

Sermon Song: Speaking God's Name

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.” - *Psalms 103: 1*

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the
LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses God's name.” – *Exodus 20: 7*

You shall not use the Lord's name in vain! Remember when we had to memorize the commandment? We probably learned it to mean that we are not to use God's name in a vulgar or disrespectful way. Like around the dinner table when God's name would slip out and mother would yell, “Do not use the Lord's name in vain!” Or like that time when we heard father out in the garage using God's name in a string of explicatives after accidentally smashing his thumb with a hammer. These days when we hear one of our children say OMG, we parents are quick to respond, “Now make sure OMG means ‘Oh my gosh’!” We were taught that God's name is only to be used prayerfully and when addressing the Creator of the universe.

But when we look to our bibles, the misuse of God's name is a far more serious offense. As far as commandments go, it is number three on the big ten's list. It comes after the command regarding idolatry and is a far greater warning than simply letting God's name slip out of our mouths in an inappropriate way. It is a warning not to use God's name for something that God would have nothing to do with.

When preachers spread hate in the name of God.
When laws are passed that harm God's children and creation, using God's name to justify it.
When leaders claim to be “the chosen one” when referring to being strong or powerful against the so-called “enemy,” the name of God becomes stained and emptied and untrustworthy.
All we have to do is look to history to see how times even the church has done awful things in the name of God.

You shall not misuse the Lord's name.
The commandment isn't warning us against the use of God's name as much as it is a warning about what we are using God's name for. Is it to bless the world or is it to mess the world?

Bless the Lord, O my soul
O my soul, worship God's holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul
Worship God's holy name¹

A rabbi once taught me something radical about the meaning of speaking God's name. You see, when God made God's presence known to us, the Jewish people had to figure out how to name this Divine being. They struggled and struggled, quickly realizing that any name they gave to God would ultimately fall short. I mean, how do you describe a God who is beyond human

¹ This chorus is adapted with non-gender specific language from the song *10,000 Reasons: Bless the Lord, O My Soul* by Matt Redmond.

language? How do you put a word that is big enough to encapsulate the love that turns the stars and the planets? So they decided the closest they could come to speaking God's name was to not speak a word at all, but to simply take in a breath.

Breathe in—"Yah" and breathe out—"weh."
Breathe in—"Yah" and breath out, "weh."

Do you hear it? Yah—weh. God's name is spoken every time we breathe. So when you were born the first thing you did was to speak God's name. And the very last thing every single one of us will do before we will die is to speak God's name. Yah-weh. Yah-weh.

Do we realize what this means? It means the gift of God's presence is already inside of us. The gift of God's love is already ours; and whenever we forget all we have to do is take a breath. It's why the psalmist sings, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Notice she is addressing her own soul within herself. Bless the Lord, *O my soul*. She is summoning her own soul to be used to bless God.

Now the Hebrew word for "soul" here is *nephesh*. And wouldn't you know the first time the word appears is at the beginning, when God forms the first human being from the soil of the earth, breathing into his nostrils; giving him a soul, a *nephesh—God's breath becoming the foundation for ours; God's very name deposited into the deepest core of who we are*. The psalmist is crying out to the *nephesh* that is already within herself as she sings:

Bless the Lord, O my soul
O my soul, worship God's holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul
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So keep breathing and keep speaking God's name Trinity.

When anxiety robs us of our breath and busy schedules exhaust the day, keep breathing and speaking God's name.

When daily acts of injustice leave us breathless and we hear our friends of color suffocating in systemic chokeholds of racism crying out, "I can't breathe!" keep breathing and speaking God's name.

When lies circulate in our air and doses of despair knock the wind out of us, keep blessing the world with the gift of love and peace and compassion and justice that is already within you.

And if you *ever* forget, you do not need to worry.

All you have to do is connect with your very next breath.

(Yah-weh) (Yah-weh)